

On *Moll Flanders* :
An Analysis of Moll's Double Vision

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Today, we know that *Moll Flanders*¹ is not a true story but fiction, although Defoe uses a great deal of information about women criminals like Moll King and Callico Sarah to form the base of *Moll Flanders*.² To describe the inner life of the protagonist by using the form of the autobiographical memoir was 'the most immediate and widespread literary expression of the introspective tendency of Puritanism in general' in Defoe's age.³ Defoe was brought up as a Puritan and he followed this literary tendency as a Puritan.

When Defoe remarks to us that *Moll Flanders* is a personal history, he also makes us conscious that there is a possibility of taking it as fiction. From the very first part of this novel, we face Defoe's writing style of using double vision which affects Moll's world.

As G.A. Starr remarks,⁴ we are asked to distinguish what Moll does and what she essentially is. We are asked to sympathize with her as well as criticize her through Moll's double vision and be flexible when we analyze her actions. Of course, little Moll does not have double vision yet. It is important for Moll to have double vision, because it provides her reasons to justify herself. The process of how she learns to have it and makes it expand in her world will be discussed in this paper. I believe that this analysis will show us Defoe's way of expanding stories into a novel in some degree.

Moll was born at Newgate and soon taken away from her mother. To be born in a prison is a very miserable condition for children. They easily come to be criminals like their mothers under such circumstances. It is Moll's luck that she comes to be taken care of by a good-natured governess. Little Moll tells us what she wants to be. Symbolically innocent Moll says that she wants to be a gentlewoman like one of her neighbors called 'Madam.' Actually the lady is 'a person of ill Fame' (p. 14). Little Moll sees only the surface fact that the lady is called 'Madam' and doesn't need to go out to service. 'Madam' is literally a respectful form of address. Nevertheless, she doesn't seem to be respected. Little Moll doesn't realize that things have duality. As this predic-

tive episode shows us, Moll becomes a gentlewoman in the overt meaning as well as in the covert meaning which little Moll doesn't notice.

After the death of this motherly governess, Moll is taken to the Colchester family, where she is to be seduced by the elder brother. Young Moll becomes his secret love. When Moll tells us as an aged monitor how young Moll comes to be seduced, she calls it her virtuous destruction. Moll never forgets to provide instruction whenever it is required, or Defoe feels that it must be required, so that Defoe always makes us conscious that aged Moll stands behind young and active Moll, as Maximillian E. Novak remarks.⁵ And yet Moll's aged critical opinions never spoil her young and vivid figure.

Here is a scene in which the elder brother is seducing young Moll.

However as he press'd me to speak, I told him, I had no Reason to question the Sincerity of his Love to me, after so many Protestations, But and there I stopp'd, as if I left him to Guess the rest; But What my Dear? says he, I guess what you mean; what if you should be with Child, is not that it? Why then, says he, I'll take Care of you, and Provide for you, and the Child too, here's an Earnest for you; and with that he pulls out a Silk Purse, with a Hundred Guineas in it, and gave it me; and I'll give you such another, says he, every Year till I Marry you. (p. 28)

The elder brother is rather realistic and practical in seducing her. It is interesting that his love and sincerity are guaranteed by money. It is more interesting to see Moll's reaction to it.

My Colour came, and went, at the Sight of the Purse, and with the fire of his Proposal together; so that I could not say a Word, and he easily perceiv'd it; so putting the Purse into my Bosom, I made no more Resistance to him . . . (pp. 28-29)

Her first reaction is to the sight of the silk purse. She accepts his sincerity of money. Money has much importance to Moll all her life. She is very honest about her greediness for money. She doesn't realize that her greediness for money and his desire for Moll under the name of love yet.

Then the young brother makes a proposal of marriage to her, which annoys her very much. It is natural that she cannot accept his proposal moralistically, since she already has relations with the elder brother. She feels that she is the elder brother's wife in a sense. She is to be persuaded to marry the younger brother named Robin by the elder brother nevertheless. Sad to say, she has to accept that it is the elder brother himself who is trying to

marry her to Robin. She says that 'So naturally do Men give up Honour and Justice, Humanity and even Christianity, to secure themselves' (p. 58). She also says that Robin 'had the Thanks of a faithful Friend for shifting off his Whore into his Brother's Arms for a Wife' (p. 58). Moll is, as a monitor, very cynical in using the term 'faithful Friend.' Young Moll follows the elder brother's example after all. She has no alternative but to marry Robin to secure herself.

When Moll confesses her secret sinful desire of adultery and incest with the elder brother, we may be impressed with her honesty about her emotion rather than her moral corruption in the literal meaning of her words. She criticizes herself, 'as effectively criminal in the Nature of the Guilt,' as if she 'had actually done it' (p. 59). Even if she feels guilty, she seems to enjoy her life. With all her guilty conscience of adultery and incest, she is content to keep her settled way of life with Robin. After Robin's death, Moll becomes free again, with a fortune this time. She is still young and beautiful.

Moll's second husband is a gentleman-tradesman whom she calls 'a land-water-thing' (p. 60). What Moll obtains from this marriage is his surface symbolism of duality. When his drapery goes into bankruptcy and he is forced to go away, Moll is to be left alone in a strange situation in which she has 'a Husband and no Husband.' (p. 64) Like her husband, Moll comes to have her surface symbolism of duality. She must look for a single man with a fortune and marry him. She has no choice, must accept double vision in order to justify herself. This kind of double vision is provided to justify her actions to readers.

She becomes very careful to obtain what she really needs. She carefully chooses a Virginia planter who has an agreeable appearance with a fortune and has no wife, so that he can marry her. She manages to get him to propose to her handsomely. In the courtship scene, Moll manages to have him admit to her agreeableness as a wife and not to take into account her fortune. He says that he marries her not for money but for love. When she tells him that she has little fortune, he takes it that her modesty makes her tell him so. It is only because he believes that the rumor of her property is true. That is why he insists that he wants to marry her only for love without any hesitation. The time to make him know that actually she has little fortune comes soon after their marriage. He cannot blame her for the rumor about her fortune. It was he himself who didn't believe her words but relied on the rumor. Overtly she is not responsible for the rumor, but covertly she is fully responsible. She uses the rumor effectively to make him believe that she must be rich and yet she is so modest that she cannot tell him that she has a fortune. Her

verbal message is given to him with a non-verbal message that he should believe the rumor about her is true and therefore her words must be taken as her modest expression. He responds to her verbal and non-verbal message at once. Thus, Moll uses duality of communication and yet expects her listeners and readers to understand how she manages well, as M.E. Novak remarks.⁶ The Virginia planter is completely under Moll's control. He does what she expects him to do, and says what she expects him to say. She knows how to get the initiative in playing games by now. She remarks to us, 'I got over the Fraud of passing for a Fortune without Money, and cheating a Man into Marrying me on pretence of a Fortune' (p. 84).

Their married life in Virginia seems to be happy at first. Their happy marriage, however, doesn't last long. She comes to face duality in life which is good and yet evil more seriously than before. Her mother-in-law turns out to be her real mother, and therefore, her husband is her half-brother. We come to know that her confession of feeling guilty for incest in the episode of marriage with Robin was predictive. Moll is now literally sinful, though she is not responsible for this sin overtly. Once the covert truth of her mother comes to the surface, her settled way of life, which she always tries to obtain and got from the Virginia planter, must come to end. As she has strong self-preservation, she is careful not to lose herself even under this dreadful situation, while her husband receives a severe shock which makes him lose himself. She overcomes her identity crisis, so that she is not in a hurry to get rid of this dreadful situation but carefully prepared to be independent.

Her next adventure of seeking a man occurs at Bath. Her unfortunate loss of property at sea forces her to go out to look for someone who can support her and provide her a settled way of life. Her lover in Bath has a wife and no wife in Moll's vision. Their love affair lasts six years. She describes it as 'six years in this happy but unhappy Condition' (p. 120). In one sense she is happy because she is supported by her lover financially and she doesn't need to worry about money. In another sense she is unhappy because the relation between Moll and her lover is very unstable and moralistically unrespectable. She fears that some day they will break up, and therefore, she will be left alone without fortune or with a little fortune at most.

One night Moll goes to his wife's house, where he is sick and in bed. She hasn't seen him for a long while. She fears that he is breaking relations with her. She is really fearful of losing her financial support. Under the necessity of seeing how he is and how their relation turns out to be, she goes in disguise like 'a Servant Maid in a Round Cap and Straw Hat' (p. 121). She has already learned how to disguise her appearance and pretend to be someone in a

different situation. Moll explains how she manages it as follows:

I . . . went to the Door, as sent by a Lady of his Neighbourhood, where he liv'd before, and giving Master and Mistress Service, I said I was sent to know How Mr. did, and how he had rested that Night; in delivering this Message I got the opportunity I desir'd, for speaking with one of the Maids, I held a long Gossips Tale with her and had all the Particulars of his Illness. (p. 121)

She is really an active person full of vitality. She doesn't wait for someone's coming, but she goes out to seek someone or something which may make her situation more agreeable. Her energies are fully attractive to us. This characterization of her is, however, rather different from the image of the woman in general presented by Moll in order to explain how her situation turned out to be after her Bath lover left her. She says:

When a Woman is thus left desolate and void of Council, she is just like a Bag of Money, or a Jewel dropt on the Highway, which is a Prey to the next Comer; if a Man of Virtue and upright Principles happens to find it, he will have it cried, and the Owner may come to hear of it again; but how many times shall such a thing fall into Hands that will make no scruple of Seizing it for their own, to once that it shall come into good Hands. (p. 128)

It seems that a woman like this is passive and doing nothing but waiting. She is, however, not such a kind as above. It is true that Moll's situation is unstable and she has no supporter materially and mentally. Her active and energetic image is paralleled with the image from Defoe's device of making us believe that she is a weak creature and must be sympathized with.

The bank clerk's case goes on in parallel with the case of the Lancashire man. Moll's situation becomes more complicated. The bank clerk has 'a wife and no wife.' Here again, double vision in Moll's world is presented to us. He says that his wife is not worthy to be his wife any more, and therefore, he has no wife. As long as he has a wife, he is not agreeable to Moll's purpose of marriage. Moll has to wait until their divorce makes the bank clerk free to marry. In any case, she is not the type to just wait alone without doing anything. Instead, she goes out to look for a man who can provide her with a settled way of life.

The process of marrying a Lancashire man may remind us of the case of how Moll managed to marry the Virginia planter. This time, however, Moll and the Lancashire man are reciprocally cheated. Like Moll, he has a good

appearance with the rumor of his fortune. He seems agreeable to her purpose. He believes the rumor of her property is true and her fortune will be enough to support their happy marriage, therefore he makes a proposal of marriage to her. She herself should have known that appearances seldom coincide with reality. She comes to know that he has no fortune. It seems that Moll feels their mutual cheating is forgivable because they both need to obtain a spouse of fortune to have a settled way of life. That is why they love each other even after they face the reality of their situation. Then they have to accept that their marriage has to be ended. No matter how much they love each other, it is nonetheless true that they cannot live on love alone. They must obtain money to live on. This is an impressive scene which makes her visible to us as a lovable character.

Nothing that ever befell me in my Life, sunk so deep into my Heart as this Farewell: I reproach'd him a Thousand times in my Thoughts for leaving me, for I would have gone with him thro' the world, if I had beg'd my Bread. I felt in my Pocket, and there I found ten Guineas, his Gold Watch, and two little Rings, one a small Diamond Ring, worth only about Six Pound, and the other a plain Gold Ring.

I sat me down and look'd upon these Things two Hours together, and scarce spoke a Word, till my Maid interrupt'd me, by telling me my Dinner was ready: I eat but little, and after Dinner I fell into a vehement Fit of crying, every now and then, calling him by his Name, which was James, O Jemy, said I, come back, come back, I'll give you all I have; I'll beg, I'll starve with you, and thus I run Raving about the Room several times, and then sat down between whiles, and then walking about again, call'd upon him to come back, and then cry'd again. (p. 153)

She is very sincere at this moment. She loves him from the bottom of her heart in a sense. She knows that one cannot live on air alone, therefore it is impossible for them to live together and to continue their marriage. She can never be a beggar. She is rather indulging herself in her own emotion of love. One side of Moll's self loves her Lancashire husband very much, while another side of herself is very careful not to lose the possibility of marrying the bank clerk. She keeps in touch with the bank clerk all along, and after all she gets married to him.

This bank clerk husband comes to die of depression from the loss of his fortune. This trouble is caused by one of his confidential colleagues. He has confidence in his colleague too much. Unfortunately her fifth husband doesn't have a positive attitude towards life like Moll does. Moll remarks to us

that 'if he had had Spirit and Courage to have look'd his Misfortune in the Face, . . . he would easily recover it, for to sink under Trouble is to double the Weight, and he that will Die in it shall Die in it' (p. 189). Money has this much importance to the bank clerk husband and has power enough to take his life away. The bank clerk husband does not have strength so as to overcome all the difficulties in life, but Moll has it. She does not sink into the difficulties in life, but tries to get rid of them. After the death of the bank clerk husband, at last Moll faces the difficulties of living without any male supporter. Her youth and beauty have already gone. She cannot expect anyone to make a proposal of marriage to her and provide a settled way of life for her. Her fearfulness of being in poverty is greatly increased day by day. When we find the quotation from the Bible that 'Give me not Poverty lest I steal' (Prov. 39: 9), it is clear what becomes of her next. She herself cannot find another way but stealing in order to support herself in living.

To Moll, this is a turning-point in life. She has to change her ways of getting money to support herself from marrying someone to stealing. Then she comes to feel the existence of the devil by her. It seems that her underlying wickedness comes to the surface and separates her from herself into another figure of the devil. It means that her wickedness becomes too evil to be kept in her mind. This is an example of how the devil's temptation comes to Moll and how it is completely cold-blooded and evil. Moll tries to steal a gold necklace from a child's neck on the way home from a dancing school.

I talk'd to it [the child], and it prett'd to me again and I took it by the Hand and led it a long till I came to a pav'd Alley that goes into Bartholomew Close, and I led it in there; the Child said that was not its way home; I said, yes, my Dear it is, I'll show you the way home; the Child had a little Necklace on of Gold Beads, and I had my Eye upon that, and in the dark of the Alley I stopp'd, pretending to mend the Child's Clag that was loose and took off her Necklace and the Child never felt it and so led the Child on again: Here, I say, the Devil put me upon killing the Child in the dark Alley, that it might not Cry; but the very thought frighten'd me so that I was ready to drop down, but I turn'd the Child about and had it go back again, for that was not its way home; . . . (p. 194)

Since Moll is highly tempted to steal a gold necklace on the Child's neck, she approaches the child with the appearance of being a kind lady of middle-age. After she steals the gold necklace, she is again tempted to get rid of this little witness forever. It is dark in the alley and nobody will know her crime even

if she kills the child there. No criminal can be safe as long as there exists a living witness against him. In this point, Moll can be definitely evil. In another moment her goodness overcomes her evil temptation for murder. She hears the Devil's voice, and yet she follows it, but her conscience won't let her kill.

Thus, Moll's double vision is made and expanded through her experiences. This double vision provides her reasons to justify her actions to others. When she really obtains her settled way of life and her appearance of being a gentlewoman comes to have reality, she has no need to excuse herself and to find reasons to justify herself. She no longer needs her double vision. It brings this novel to a close.

As we have seen so far, Defoe gives us full information to characterize Moll Flanders and enough to make her figure real, so that she would coincide with daily life in every detail, as E.M.Forster remarks to us.⁷ Since we have her as a vivid character, we enjoy her evil phase as well as her good phase, and we sympathize with her in her sinful life through Moll's double vision which makes her agreeable in a sense. What the author expects us to understand overtly and covertly is given through an aged monitor of Moll and through a vivid characterization of Moll at once. These paralleled tones of Moll Flanders form the structural duality in this novel.

NOTES

1. *Moll Flanders*, ed. George A. Starr (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). All references to *Moll Flanders* are to this edition.
2. Gerald Hawson, "Who was Moll Flanders," *Times Literary Supplement* 3438 (1968), pp. 63-64.
3. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1957), p. 84.
4. G. A. Starr, "Moll Flanders," in *Defoe and Casuistry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 111-165.
5. Maximillian E. Novak, "Defoe's 'Indifferent Monitor': The Complexity of Moll Flanders," *ECS* 3 (1970), pp. 351-365.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 356.

7. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974), pp. 64-69.

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